

Friday, February 25, 1983

WORLD NEWS

As Barbie Erodes France's Complacency, He Spurs W. Germany's

By William Drexler

BONN—An episode of the 13-part series "Europe Under the Swastika" was drawing to a close as the television screen filled with a collage of grisly corpses who were victimized by fellow Frenchmen in the days of the Nazi occupation.

The multitude of informers and deputy torturers who chattered the Nazi tape of their own country, the German narrator implied, had been forgiven or forgotten—as is always the case in France.

After marking the 50th anniversary of Adolf Hitler's rise to power with a searing self-appraisal, West Germans are watching with a touch of Schadenfreude—or malignant delight—as the French cope with tales of collaboration that have emerged since the arrest and deportation to France of Klaus Barbie, known as the Nazi "Butcher of Lyons."

Last month France and West Germany celebrated 25 years since signing a friendship treaty with an exchange of state visits by their two

leaders that hailed the countries' intimate economic and political ties. Yet, despite the remarkable metaphors involved in shedding decades of enmity in favor of a close alliance, old suspicions and resentments from the Nazi years still permeate in both countries.

West Germans disdain France's lingering self-righteousness toward the war, particularly the reluctance to debunk myths of French resistance. And more than any of West Germany's neighbors, France fears a German nationalist resurgence in the guise of a swing toward neutralism, a notion that evokes exasperation in West German political circles.

When Barbie was escorted aboard a plane to France two weeks ago after decades of exile in Bolivia, the French press worried that a resurgence of outrage over Barbie's crimes might spoil the warm climate of relations so recently treated in Paris and Bonn.

Rather than recoil in shame over poignant tales of atrocities, many West Germans festered at accounts

of these Frenchmen who facilitated Barbie's notorious reign in Lyons.

"France, too, must now preoccupy itself with its unconquered past," wrote Joseph Rovin in the political weekly *Die Zeit*. "The dimensions of collaboration should be totally uncovered.... The police and the gendarmes who gave away the Jews, and sometimes members of the resistance, to the Germans; all these good, upright Frenchmen, without whom a few hundred Nazi officials in France would not have been able to do as much as they did."

German television programs since Barbie's arrest have carried a theme that France should start to come to terms with its sordid chapters of the war, just as West Germany has with a spate of programs and exhibits analyzing the Nazi era this year—in contrast to the virtual blackout in the early postwar years.

The absence of breast-beating in West Germany over the Barbie case, despite accounts that he worked for German as well as U.S. intelligence services while in exile and was not sought for extradition by Bonn until

last March, underscores the conviction among younger West Germans that they cannot be held responsible for horrors perpetrated by the Nazis that are beyond their imagination.

At the same time, many West Germans resent the lectures resounding from Paris about the dangers of a drift toward neutralism or away from the Atlantic Alliance in the vain search for a reunification with East Germany.

In a powerful speech before the West German Bundestag last month, French President Francois Mitterrand assailed "all those who would bet on a decoupling between Europe and the United States and warned that such people risked creating a military imbalance with the East Bloc that would threaten peace."

Mitterrand endorsed stationing new Pershing II and cruise missiles in West Germany this year if U.S. Soviet arms control talks fail to achieve agreement. He also ruled out any consideration of France's nuclear deterrent force in the Geneva talks.

Differences over these two key security umbrellas

issues have badly divided French and West German Social Democrats, who have been striving to encourage compromises that would keep new missiles out of West Germany.

"The French claim about neutralism is absolute stupidity and nonsense," said the Social Democrats' disarmament expert, Benno Bahr, in an interview. "Mitterrand is the real successor to [Charles] de Gaulle, who favors every U.S. weapons system in West Germany so long as he does not have to take them in France."

Bahr accompanied his party's candidate for chancellor in the March 6 elections, Hans-Jochen Vogel, on a trip to Paris last month following visits to Washington and Moscow.

After telling the French president that if he were so keen on the missiles he should consider them for his own country, Bahr quipped Mitterrand as replying that situations in France and West Germany were "not comparable, for history has shown that the Federal Republic of Germany is not independent" and is obliged to remain under the U.S. security umbrella.



KLAUS BARBIE

... arrest forces memories of French

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCE METHODS EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2000 2006